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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000294

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/17/2017

TAGS: PREL PHUM KDEM KPAO CU LO

SUBJECT: CUBA TRANSITION COORDINATOR MCCARRY FINDS

AGREEMENT IN BRATISLAVA

REF: A. HAVANA 367

1B. BERLIN 866

1C. BRATISLAVA 140

Classified By: Ambassador Rodolphe M. Vallee for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).).

11. (C) SUMMARY. On May 4, Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry met with the Slovak MFA State Secretary and Political Director, Members of Parliament, NGO representatives, and former dissidents in Bratislava. McCarry informed his interlocutors of the increased repression and summary trials since the transition of power from Fidel to Raul Castro, and shared copies of the Cuban dissidents "Unity for Freedom" statement. McCarry underscored the importance of maintaining the EU Common Position, including the restrictive measures. The MFA officials confirmed that Slovakia supports the existing EU Common Position on Cuba and does not believe that the EU will water down the position during its upcoming annual review. They also concurred that the Moratinos visit to Havana was counter-productive. The NGOs and former dissidents discussed the importance of supporting civil society and maintaining lines of communication with dissidents. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) In his various meetings, McCarry emphasized the importance of the U.S. and the EU publicly advocating their common goal for Cuba - that the Cuban people should be able to determine their own future and their own government. He informed his interlocutors of increased repression and summary trials in Cuba since the transition of power from Fidel to Raul Castro, and shared copies of the Cuban dissidents' "Unity for Freedom" statement (ref A). He noted that, simultaneously, civil society supporters have become more public in their calls for democracy on the island. Additionally, he relayed his impressions from the prior week's NGO-hosted conference on Cuba in Berlin (ref B), including a meaningful discussion on the issue by the European participants and the concrete recommendations they produced.

SLOVAKIA AGREES WITH U.S. STRATEGY, EU TACTICS

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13. (C) According to MFA Political Director Miroslav Lajcak, the GOS concurs with 99% of the U.S.-proposed joint U.S.-EU statement on Cuba. Lajcak and State Secretary Olga Algayerova were in agreement with McCarry's statements that Cuba's destiny should be determined by the Cuban people. The MFA officials confirmed that Slovakia supports the continued stance of the EU Common Position on Cuba and does not believe that the EU will water down the position during its upcoming annual review. On the other hand, the MFA does not think the EU has the consensus to strengthen the Common Position, nor to agree on the mid- and long-term strategy paper. As for a tactical approach to Cuba, the GOS supports the EU

double-track, limited-engagement method. Slovakia is in the process of negotiating an economic agreement with Cuba in order to settle decades-old debt and to strengthen its economic interests there. The Slovaks pointed out that they will intentionally not send a cabinet level minister to Cuba to conclude the agreement, but rather a State Secretary (equivalent to Deputy Minister). Lajcak said the MFA shares the U.S. opinion that the visit of Spanish FM Moratinos was counter-productive to the goal of increased civil and human rights in Cuba. He and his colleagues explained that nobody was fooled by the Cuban regime's empty symbolic gestures, such as the recent release of several political prisoners who had completed their sentences.

¶4. (C) Lajcak noted the various ways that the GOS is encouraging a democratic civil society in Cuba: the Slovak Embassy in Havana hosts an uncensored internet cafe and remains in contact with dissidents, the GOS interacts with Slovak NGOs involved in Cuba, various MPs and even a cabinet member have "adopted" Cuban dissidents. The MFA will host a roundtable discussion with local NGOs and the parliamentary human rights committee within the next few weeks to discuss Slovakia's stance on Cuba before the June GAERC meeting. McCarry's discussion with State Secretary Algayerova focused on the potential for cooperation between the U.S. and Slovakia on democratization projects in Cuba.

#### MPs SUPPORT DEMOCRACY, WARN OF DIFFICULTIES IN TRANSITION

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¶5. (C) Lunch discussions with MPs from five of the six parliamentary parties - Boris Zala of Smer, Laszlo Nagy of SMK, Frantisek Miklosko of KDH, Martin Fedor of SDKU, and Rafael Rafaj of SNS - focused on the complexities of

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transitioning from a communist state to a democratic one. The neighborhood context of Cuba, entirely different than the Slovak experience, would play a significant role, they noted. The MPs advised that issues such as property restitution and privatization must be handled carefully, highlighting the need to avoid the "wild" privatization that Slovakia went through. McCarry pointed out that the U.S. has gone on record against arbitrary evictions of people from their homes and that we believe Cubans will want a democratically-elected government to resolve important issues, such as property claims. Several of the MPs had traveled to Cuba personally, one noting that the Cuban opposition was much further along in preparing for the details of a democratic state than the Slovaks had been before 1989. The disunity of the opposition could pose a problem, several people noted. McCarry provided written copies of the "Unity for Freedom" statement and urged his interlocutors to help draw attention to it. Nagy suggested that the Slovak parliament could enter the statement into its official record. Overall, the MPs were supportive of the idea of democracy in Cuba, but expressed varying levels of engagement on the issue. We encouraged the MPs to consider statements of support for democracy in Cuba.

#### SLOVAK CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVELY HELPING CUBAN OPPOSITION

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¶6. (SBU) Representatives from five local NGOs, including three who had attended the prior week's conference in Berlin, described their activities in support of Cuban dissidents. The NGOs are attempting to raise awareness in Slovakia of the harshness of the Cuban regime and difficulties faced by political dissidents there (ref C). Most of the NGO reps had traveled to Cuba personally, meeting dissidents, documenting their stories, and distributing material support. One trip, focusing on the need for educational reform, resulted in a comparative analysis which will be published soon. McCarry also met with a former dissident and student leaders from the Czechoslovak Velvet Revolution who emphasized, among other

things, the importance of Cubans being in charge of the transition in their country, of letting the Cuban activists know that the outside world cares about them, and of developing an independent media after transition. They offered the advice based on the Slovak experience that any post-transition reconciliation mechanism would have greater legitimacy if it could investigate Batista-era wrongdoings in addition to those of the communist regime.

MEDIA

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¶7. (U) McCarry's interview with the daily newspaper Hospodarske Noviny resulted in a balanced article, covering his major themes and highlighting the sense of change occurring on the island over the past nine months.

CUBAN CHARM OFFENSIVE

¶8. (SBU) The Cuban Ambassador in Bratislava, who is received no higher than the Director of the Americas section at the MFA, has launched an aggressive charm offensive, noted one MFA official. The Ambassador, who has a Slovak mother and several siblings with Slovak citizenship, appears regularly in popular media outlets. Several NGO reps also pointed out that much of the Slovak populace, though not giving too much thought to Cuba, does not view the status quo on the island negatively.

¶9. (U) This message has been cleared by Cuba Transition Coordinator Caleb McCarry.

VALLEE